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ABSTRACT

This report describes a process for increasing primary students' reading comprehension skills through the use of a guided reading program. The targeted population consisted of primary students in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the Midwest. The problems of poor reading comprehension scores were documented through the use of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests and end of selection tests. Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students are lacking basic reading comprehension skills. Analysis of Guided Reading for Teachers Survey revealed inconsistent use of guided reading end of selection tests, fall and spring assessment and graphic organizers. Increase of English as a Second Language population has revealed low reading comprehension scores among these students. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of two major categories of Guided Reading Intervention: consistent use of graphic organizers and end of selection tests. Post intervention data indicated an increase in student reading comprehension skills through the use of graphic organizers and a guided reading program. Appendixes contain the teacher survey, a guided reading checklist, a sample end of selection test, and a consent letter. (Contains 40 references and 7 figures.) (Author/RS)

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INCREASING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH THE USE OF GUIDED READING

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

Saint Xavier University & Skylight Professional Development
Field-Based Masters Program
Chicago, Illinois
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This report describes a process for increasing primary students reading comprehension skills through the use of a guided reading program. The targeted population consisted of primary students in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the Midwest. The problems of poor reading comprehension scores were documented through the use of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests and end of selection tests.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed that students are lacking basic reading comprehension skills. Analysis of Guided Reading for Teachers Survey revealed inconsistent use of guided reading end of selection tests, fall and spring assessment and graphic organizers. Increase of English as a Second Language population has revealed low reading comprehension scores among these students.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of two major categories of Guided Reading Intervention: consistent use of graphic organizers and end of selection tests.

Post intervention data indicated an increase in student reading comprehension skills through the use of graphic organizers and a guided reading program.

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTENT

General Statement of the Problem

According to the California Department of Education, the heart of a powerful reading program is the relationship between explicit, systematic skills instruction and literature, language and comprehension. While skills alone are insufficient to develop good readers, no reader can become proficient without these foundational skills (Honig,1996). Research indicates that if children do not become successful readers by the end of third grade, it is difficult for them to catch up with their peers in later years (Honig,1996). According to Clay (1988), inappropriate reading habits can be a real stumbling block to higher levels of understanding. The probability that a child who is a poor reader at the end of first grade will remain a poor reader at the end of fourth grade is 88% . The role of the classroom teacher is a critical factor in ensuring the success of struggling readers.

Students of the targeted primary grade classrooms from sites A, B, C and D have been identified as lacking basic reading comprehension skills. Evidence for the existence of this problem include student observations of students during guided reading instruction, Gates MacGinitie Reading Test, end of selection tests and guided reading for teachers survey.

Local Setting Site A

School A is located in a northwest suburban area of a large city in the Midwest. The racial/ethnic background of the student population of School A is 80.4% Caucasian, 15.3%, Asian/Pacific Islanders, 3.2% Hispanic, 1.2% African American. There are no Native Americans. Of the student population, 1.1% is classified as low income students and 6.3% as limited-English-proficient.

The student attendance rate is 96.0%; the student mobility rate is 16.6%. There are no chronic truants (School Report Card, School A, 2001).

The racial/ethnic background of the 45 certified teaching staff of School A is 98.0% Caucasian, 0.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.6% African American. There are no Hispanics or Native Americans. Of the 45 certified staff in School A, there are 31 classroom teachers, 2 special education teachers, 2 physical education teachers, a speech teacher, 2 gifted teachers, 2 music teachers, an art teacher, a social worker, a librarian, an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and a technology teacher. The gender breakdown of the teaching staff is 93.0% female and 7% male. The teaching staff has an average of 9.8 years of teaching experience; 35.5% have a Bachelors degree, and 64.5% have a Master's degree or above. The average teacher's salary is $43,266 (School Report Card, School A, 2001).

School A is one of two elementary schools in a suburban school district. The building was built in 1981. The two-story, brick building is in the shape of two large L's. A well equipped blacktop playground provides recreation in the rear of the school. The is also a small playground on the east side of the building. Inside School A are 33 full sized classrooms, 4 smaller classrooms for specialized teaching, a library, a computer lab housing 30 Macintosh computers, a gymnasium, a multipurpose room, 2 music rooms, an art room, a conference room, the principal's office, the assistant principal's office, the nurse's office, several storage areas and a teachers lounge. The local fire department and park district are within walking distance of the school grounds. Students frequently take field trips to both of these facilities.

School A has a major commitment to improvement through the use of

technology. Every classroom has a minimum of three computers and a printer. All computers have Internet capabilities.

Within School A, a special education teacher is employed full-time serving 15 students for an average of 200 minutes per week. The special education teacher works with the classroom teacher either within the classroom or on a pullout basis to assist students with special needs. The gifted teacher works with students who have been identified through Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) and teacher recommendation. The service provides gifted students with enriched activities to supplement their classroom learning. A social worker is available to assist students with personal and social development. An ESL state certified teacher is employed on a full-time basis to work individually with students or within classrooms as needed. Student in grades first through fourth participate in physical education 3 times a week for 30 minutes. Also, within the school week, students participate in two 30 minute music classes and a 50 minute art class. All music and art teachers are taught by educators with degrees in their respective fields.

Within the past five years, parents have become increasingly concerned about reading in School A. Responding to this growing concern, the Board of Education agreed to adopt a new reading program that was implemented in the fall of 2000 for grades K-4. The Scholastic Reading Program (2000) has been used successfully. Guided Reading begins in first grade and is recommended through fourth grade. The Guided Reading Program is not used by all teachers.

Community Setting Site A

The 2000 demographics of Community A include a total population of 43,000 with a median age of 37.1 years. The total population is 47.7% male and

52.3% female. The ethnicity is 98.4% Caucasian, less than 1.0% African-American, 6.6% Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1.0% Hispanic. The average educational attainment is 14.0 years (School Report Card, School A, 2001). The average household income is $81,125 with a median household income of $63,987. The per capita income is $30,048 (Facts and Figures, Community A, 2001).

District A consists of two elementary schools (kindergarten through fourth grades), two middle schools (fifth through eighth grades), and one high school (ninth through twelfth grades). The total district enrollment is 2,649 students. The district attendance rate is 95.8%, with a chronic truancy rate of 2.4%. The student mobility rate is 8.4%. Low income families in the district are 1.8%. Limited English proficient students are 3.4% of the district population. Within the district 84.7% of students are Caucasian, 11.1% are Asian/Pacific Islanders, 3.2% are Hispanic, 1.0% are African American and no Native American (School Report Card, School A, 2001).

For the students in District A, the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) scores in each of the areas tested and the percent of students who meet or exceed state goals on ISAT scores for each of the areas tested are as follows: reading, 80%; mathematics, 92%; writing, 84%; science, 88%; and social science 85%. District A has an equalized assessed valuation per pupil of $213,493. The total school tax rate is $2.93 per $100,000 of assessed value. The instructional expenditure per pupil in School District A is $3,670. The operating expenditure per pupil is $6,899 (School Report Card, School A, 2001).

The district is guided by its strategic plan, which is developed in cooperation with parents and community leaders. Ongoing strategies include

(a) unity of students, staff, parents, community and board; (b) use of the school improvement planning process within buildings; (c) assurance of fiscal responsibilities; (d) provision of adequate funding; (e) preparations to meet the demands of a growing local population (School Report Card, District A, 2001).

Local Setting Site B

School B is located in a north suburb of a large Midwestern city. School B is one of three elementary schools within the district with grades K-4 in attendance. There are 18 classrooms and 15 aides. Eighty percent are female and twenty percent are male. Seventy eight percent of the 205 member professional staff hold advanced degrees and average over 12 years of teaching experience (School B Report Card, 2001).

The average class size is 18-22 with four classes per grade level and two kindergarten classes. There are 198 boys and 171 girls attending the school. There are 69 kindergartners, 73 first graders, 77 second graders, 76 third graders and 74 fourth graders (School B Report Card, 2001).

School B has special education services provided through both the district and a special education district. School B has three reading/learning disability teachers, one social worker, one school psychologist, one nurse, one ESL teacher, two speech/language teachers, one music teacher, one private Suzuki teacher, one art teacher, two resource/librarians, two computer teachers and two Spanish teachers.

The services provided for the students in School B include a variety of educational programs. There is before and after school care available for the students who need supervision during these times. The two reading support teachers are available for any student in grades first through third who would benefit from extra support in the area of reading/writing. They may receive up up to 150 minutes per

week of one-to-one or small group sessions. The learning disability teachers provide services for the I.E.P./non-I.E.P. students through a variety of ways. Some need to participate in a pullout program up to 150 minutes per week or others receive in-class support through team teaching. These students are identified through the student support staff. The social worker provides support groups, individual counseling and classroom discussions for the students and staff members. The speech teachers provide speech and language services for any student identified and on an I.E.P. The physical education teachers also provide an after school activity club which includes a variety of sport activities throughout the year. A certified math teacher provides math lab for the students once a week. This teacher goes into the classroom and works on hands-on activities that provide an enrichment program which enhances the math curriculum. Math club is also available before school two days a week to the students who would like to participate. The school psychologist is available for team meetings, parent conferences, student observations and complete case studies.

Strong financial support of education by local residents dates back to 1859 when the first public school building was financed by private funds. Extensive parent involvement in school programs, PTA activities and a volunteers in the classrooms have assisted the district in achieving its outstanding reputation. Approximately 95 percent of the district's annual operating expense per pupil of $8,616 is derived from local sources. The district's annual budget for 2000-2001 is approximately $13.8 million (School Report Card, School B, 2001).

School B belongs to a district with four schools, two grades kindergarten through fourth grade, one fifth/sixth grade building and one seventh/eighth grade building. The school district is one of six elementary districts sending graduates to the receiving high school, from which 96 percent attend college.

School B just celebrated its 50th anniversary and the school was designated as a national historic landmark. It has received awards from the American Institute of Architects as the school most advanced in elementary school design in the United States. School B was referred to as a landmark in design for education which demonstrated that an inspired educational philosophy can be translated into an architecture of continuing function and beauty. The school contains rest areas such as the foyer and three fireplaces add to the comfortable feeling of the building. It has a gym and an auditorium that seats 400 students. It also has an outside open air stage nested in an area between two wings of the building. All of the classrooms have a private bathroom and drinking fountain, as well as a separate working area for the children. Each classroom has two iMac computers with internet capabilities and one printer. The resource center was built in 1975 in the basement. Built into the resource center is a "cooking barn", photography lab, math lab, two computer labs and a greenhouse. It has lofts and reading caves for relaxed study. School B also has a pioneer room, which consists of a working fireplace, a little school house, and the atmosphere of a log cabin.

School B building level goals include:

1. To continue to refine the communication to parents so that they are well informed about their child's progress as it relates to past school performance and future goals. School B will continue to prepare parents for their role in the Portfolio Evening Process. Additional meeting and written information will inform parents about the measures of assessment and evaluation of student performance used at School B.

2. To continue to focus attention on providing a safe and respectful school environment for all children and adults. School B has developed more effective and

efficient ways for the student to know and understand the meaning of 'a safe and respectful school' and to understand that there are consequences for failure to regard these rules and guidelines. School B will continue to evaluate and revise its efforts toward this goal.

Local Setting Site C and D

Schools C and D are located in the northwest suburban area of a large city in the Midwest. Schools C and D are located in the same school district in a small suburb having a total population of 15, 239 however; the community is adjacent to much larger suburbs. Children from three of the surrounding communities also attend Schools C and D. Schools C and D are two of four elementary schools within the district with kindergarten through second grade in attendance. There are 116 teachers, including classroom and specialty personnel, who all are Caucasian. Eighty-six percent are female and 14% are male. The average teaching experience for the district is 13.3 years. Forty-five percent of the teachers have Bachelors degrees and 54% have Masters degrees or more. The average teacher's salary is $46,420 and the average administrator's salary is $92, 838. Based on the 2000-2001 data, Schools C and D spend $7535 per pupil. This is $389 more than the state average. Seventy four percent of the district's expenditure is spent from the education fund compared to 71% which is the state average. Only 10.3% of the moneys is spent on operations and maintenance (School Report Card, School C and D, 2001).

Within the last five years, parents have shown increased concern about spelling. Responding to this growing concern, the Board of Education agreed to adopt a new spelling program that was implemented in the fall of 1997 for grades 2-8. Reading instruction begins in the first grade and continues through the eighth grade. At the primary and intermediate levels a basal reader is used with the children.

Harcourt Brace Signatures Program (1999) has been the core of the district reading program for the past two years. Phonics is taught in kindergarten through second grade using a grade appropriate phonics book, which is a component of the district reading series. Trade books, novel units, and literature circles supplement the reading program.

School C and D staff development workshops have focused on personal staff development in all curricular areas. The staff is encouraged to attend conferences and classes regarding these topics as well as technology.

The average income of the population in Schools C and D is $48,851 per household. The average resident is 32 years old. This upper middle income community boasts an average home price of $215,570. Housing ranges in price from $60,000 for the less expensive condominiums to $500,000 for a higher priced single family home. (Facts and Figures, Community Setting C, 2001).

Community Setting Site C

A total of 306 students, 80.6% Caucasian, 8.8% Asian or Pacific Islander, 9.1% Hispanic and 1.6% African American are enrolled in School C. Students from families receiving public assistance, supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches are 3.1% of the school's population. Twelve point eight percent of the students are eligible for bilingual educational services. School C has a very consistent attendance rate of 95.5%; chronic truancy is nonexistent. Student mobility rate is 14.8% (School C Report Card, 2001).

There are 15 teachers in individual classrooms in the school: one early childhood, three Kindergarten, three first grade, four second grade, and four first and second grade multiage rooms, one physical education, one full time music, and one full time art teacher. There are two classrooms that have part-time aides to assist

children with Individualized Education Plans (IEP). First and second grade students receive 90 minutes of physical education, 40 minutes of art, 40 minutes of library instruction and 40 minutes of music per week. Students with social, academic, or behavioral concerns are served by a full-time social worker, and full-time teachers specializing in Title 1, learning disabled/behavior disordered resource services, speech and language, and ESL (English as a Second Language). The average teaching experience at School C is 13.3 years. Forty four point five percent of the teachers have Bachelors degrees and 55.5% of the teachers have Masters degrees or more. The average pupil-teacher ratio is 15.9:1 (School C Report Card, 2001).

School C was built in 1965. Several additions have been added to the original structure. The most recent addition was completed in 1991. A well-equipped black topped playground provides recreation at the south end of School C. Inside School C are 15 full-sized classrooms, 5 smaller classrooms for specialized teaching, a library, a computer lab housing 25 Macintosh computers, a gymnasium that doubles as the lunchroom, the principal's office, the nurse's office, a storage area and a teachers lounge. The local library and the park district are within one mile walking distance of the school grounds. Children frequently take field trips to both of these facilities with their classrooms.

School C has a major commitment to improvement through the use of technology. Every classroom has a minimum of two computers with Internet capabilities. Each classroom teacher also has a computer that has Internet capabilities.

Various educational services and programs are currently being used at School C. School C receives grant money for Title One. Title One provides reading assistance to at-risk children in the first, second and third grades, who have been

identified by the classroom teacher and through specialized testing meeting the state criteria.

Community Setting Site D

A total of 352 students, 88% Caucasian, 7% Asian or Pacific Islander, 3.1% Hispanic, 1.1% African American, are enrolled in School D. Students from families receiving public assistance, supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced price lunches are 3.1% of the school's population. Eight percent of the students are eligible for bilingual educational services. School D has a very consistent attendance rate of 96.5%; chronic truancy is nonexistent. Student mobility rate is 6.2% (School Report Card, School D, 2001).

School D has 28 teachers: 15 classroom teachers, 2 part-time gifted teachers, 1 full-time special education teacher, 1 part-time special education teacher, 1 physical education teacher, 1 full-time speech teacher, 2 part-time music teachers, 1 part-time art teacher, 1 full-time social worker, 1 library/technology teacher, 1 English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, and 1 part-time Chapter One teacher. Ninety-three percent of teachers are female and 7% are male. The average teaching experience at School D is 13.3 years. Forty-four and one half percent of the teachers have Bachelors degrees and 55.5% of the teachers have Masters degrees or more.

School D was built in 1968. Several additions have been added to the original state erected structure. The most recent addition was completed in 1996. A large, beautifully landscaped parkway is at the entrance of the building. A well equipped black-topped playground provides recreation in the rear of School D. Inside school D are 16 full sized classrooms, 5 smaller classrooms for specialized teaching, a library, a computer lab housing 30 Macintosh computers, a gymnasium that doubles as the lunchroom, a multipurpose room, a band room, a conference room, the

principal's office, the nurse's office, several storage areas and a teachers lounge. The local library and the park district are within walking distance of the school grounds. Children frequently take field trips to both of these facilities with their classrooms.

School D has a major commitment to improvement through the use of technology. Every classroom has a minimum of four computers in it. The three fifth grade classrooms have five computers. All classrooms and teachers have Internet capabilities.

Various educational services and programs are currently being used at School D. Grades 1-8 participate in S.A.V.E., a program to educate children about drugs and alcohol, and to encourage children to make wise decisions while building confidence to not give into peer pressure. Grades K-8 also have the option of participating in the summer reading program and the Accelerated Reading Program. These offer opportunities to extend reading skills and emphasize the joy of reading outside the school environment. School D receives grant money for Chapter One. Chapter One provides reading assistance to at-risk children in the first, second and third grades, who have been identified by the classroom teacher and through specialized testing. There are two learning disability/behavior disorder(LD/BD) teachers. One LD/BD teacher is employed full-time and one LD/BD teacher is employed part-time. Each LD/BD teacher teacher services children for an average of 200 minutes per week. The average number of children for the full-time teacher is 20 students and the part-time teacher has an average of 10 children. The full-time LD/BD teacher works with grades 3-5, and the part-time LD/BD teacher works with grades K-2. The LD/BD teachers work either in the classroom or on a pullout basis to assist students with special needs. The gifted teacher works with students who have been identified through the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) and teacher recommendation. This pullout

service provides gifted students with enriched activities to supplement their classroom learning. In addition to fulfilling the academic needs of students, a social worker is available to assist school staff and students with personal development. English as a Second Language (ESL) services are available for students meeting the state criteria. An ESL state-certified teacher is employed on a full-time basis to work individually with students or within the classroom as needed. Currently the ESL teacher works individually with about 19 students for an average of 75 minutes per week. There is one full-time speech teacher employed at School D who assists children with speech and language difficulties. Additional special services include one full-time physical education teacher. Children in grades 1-5 partake in physical education classes three times a week for 30 minutes. The kindergarten children have physical education once a week for 30 minutes Children participate in a 40 minute music class and a 40 minute art class. Both music and art are taught by educators with degrees in their respective fields.

Within the last five years, parents have shown increased concern about spelling. Responding to this growing concern, the Board of Education agreed to adopt a new spelling program that was implemented in the fall of 1997 for grades 2-8. Reading instruction begins in the first grade and continues through the eighth grade. At the primary and intermediate levels a basal reader is used with the children. Harcourt Brace Signatures Program (School D, District Curriculum, 2001) has been the core of the district reading program since 2000. Phonics is taught in kindergarten through second grade using a grade appropriate phonics book, which is a component of the district reading series. Trade books, novel units, Accelerated Reader, and literature circles supplement the reading program.

School D staff development workshops have focused on personal staff

development. Staff is encouraged to attend other conferences and classes regarding this topic as well as technology.

National Context

Reading comprehension and the student's ability to interpret the text have been an issue at the heart of debate for many years, both locally and nationally. There are many techniques and methods used to teach students to read. Scarcelli (1999) expresses the idea that the wide range of options available to the classroom teacher encourage innovation, creativity, and risk-taking. However, it also leaves open to question the issue of whether or not specific skills and curriculum objectives are effectively being taught. Therefore, the concern among some educators is that consistent curriculum delivery and comparable standards are seldom found among classroom teachers in a school, between schools in a district, and among districts in a state. The various approaches to reading come in and out of fashion. There is a continuous "pendulum swing" that concerns many educators. According to Cunningham, Hall,& Defee (1998), the search for the best way to teach reading denies the reality or possibility of individual differences. Children do not all learn in the same way and consequently, approaches with particular emphases are apt to result in some children learning to read, and others not. When the pendulum swings to another approach, we may pick up some of those who were not faring too well under the previous emphasis but lose some who were (Cunningham, Hall,& Defee, 1998).

As educators, we need to become familiar with a combination of approaches that effectively enables students of all ability levels to achieve progress. According to research, a consistent daily format focusing on direct instruction of curriculum objectives is the key to increased reading comprehension for

primary students (as cited in Scarcelli, 1999). Guided reading is a technique with specific diagnostic, instructional and evaluative intent. It supports and encourages the development of strategies for independence in reading within a small cluster or group. Each child is in the role of reader. Stoicheva (1999) states that balanced reading instruction usually means a combination of whole language and phonics approaches. Researchers and practitioners alike assert that children need training in both phonemic awareness and in cueing strategies. They then can develop an awareness of individual sounds and learn to decode the text and comprehend the material (Stoicheva,1999). There is no reading approach that will produce a quick fix. Education as an intrinsically inert system needs time to yield results. Stoicheva (1999) states that curriculum alignment needs to link instructional content to clearly defined, research based standards, and to leave creative space for teachers to search and find balance in their own classrooms. All children enter school with different reading comprehension strategies.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

Problem Evidence

Students of the targeted primary grade grade classrooms from buildings A,B,C and D have been identified as lacking basic reading comprehension skills. Evidence for the existence of this problem include observations of students during guided reading instruction, Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (1995), Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (1989), end of reading selection tests and researcher developed Guided Reading for Teachers Surveys (Appendix A).

Student Observations

In the Spring of 2001, the researchers conducted a survey and an observation within four different schools in a northwestern suburb of a large midwestern community. The observations were conducted by the researchers in the Spring of 2001 and the sample consisted of second and third grade students. Student observations were conducted during a guided reading lesson consisting of a 30 to 45 minute time frame. A guided reading checklist was used to observe if students were consistently, occasionally or not using guided reading strategies. The skills observed included: decoding strategies, comprehension, and reading behaviors. The results of these observations can be seen in Figure 1.

Through the observation of students' researchers found many strengths. The researched noted that students use picture clues to decode unknown words. They all use chunking, beginning sounds, ending sounds and patterns to decode unknown words. Students are also able to retell the story. Weaknesses found through observation were that students do not always apply sight word knowledge to decode unknown words. Students are not always able to confirm

predictions, retell the setting, identify the problem, sequence events of the story, answer comprehension questions correctly or infer.

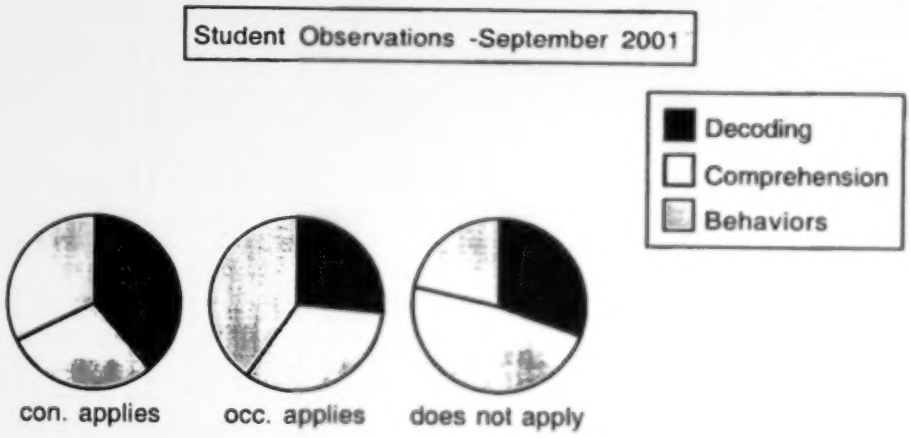

Figure 1. Student Observations of Guided Reading Strategies

Teacher Surveys

Through the study, researchers found several strengths and weaknesses of students and teachers using the guided reading program. Teachers surveyed during the study were found to use phonics programs in their classroom and word walls were used on a regular basis. Before the first reading of a story, teachers do introduce new vocabulary that is related to the story and they do use picture clues as a way to teach new vocabulary. Finally, teachers do teach their students to utilize context clues to understand unknown words. All of these strengths are important components of the guided reading program.

Weakness found through the survey include that not all teachers group their students according to reading level ability. Not all teachers use end of selection tests to assess reading comprehension and not all teachers track their student's vocabulary retention through annual assessment.

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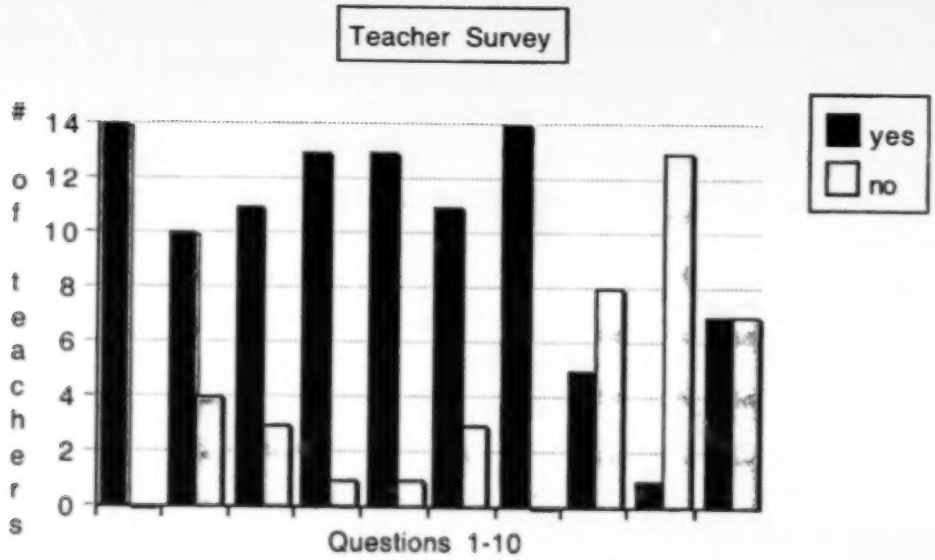

Figure 2. Guided Reading Survey for Teachers results

Gates MacGinitie Standardized Test

The Gates MacGinitie Standardized Test (1989) was administered as a pretest in September of 2001 to determine the individual reading levels of students in schools C and D. The results as seen in Figure 3, are as follows: 17.6% of students scored at a pre-primer reading level. Of students tested, 17.6% scored at a primer reading level and 23.5% scored between the beginning of first grade and the fourth month of first grade. Of the students tested 5.9% scored between the fifth month of first grade and the ninth month of first grade. Of the students tested, 11.8% scored between the beginning of second grade and the fourth month of second grade. Of the students tested 23.5% scored between the fifth month of second grade and the ninth month of second grade.

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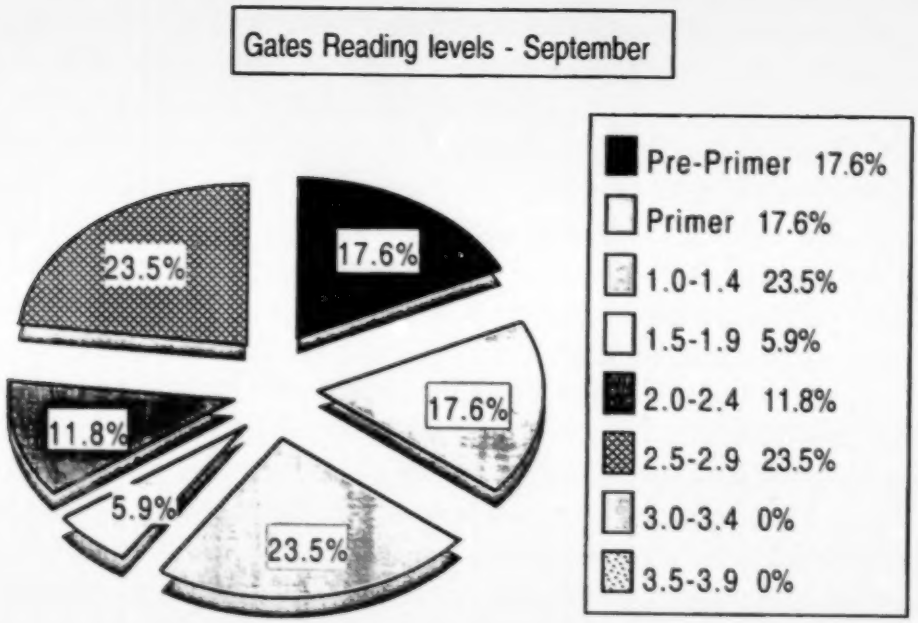

Figure 3. Gates-MacGinitie PreTest Reading Levels, September 2001

Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)

During the Spring of 2001, the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (1995) was given to students from School B. This was administered as an informal reading inventory designed to determine the instructional reading level of students. The results are shown below in Figure 4. From School B, 11.9% of students scored at a pre-primer level and 5.6% of students scored at a primer reading level. Of the students tested 22.2% scored at a first grade reading level, 38.9% of students scored at a second grade reading level and 22.2% of students scored at a third grade reading level.

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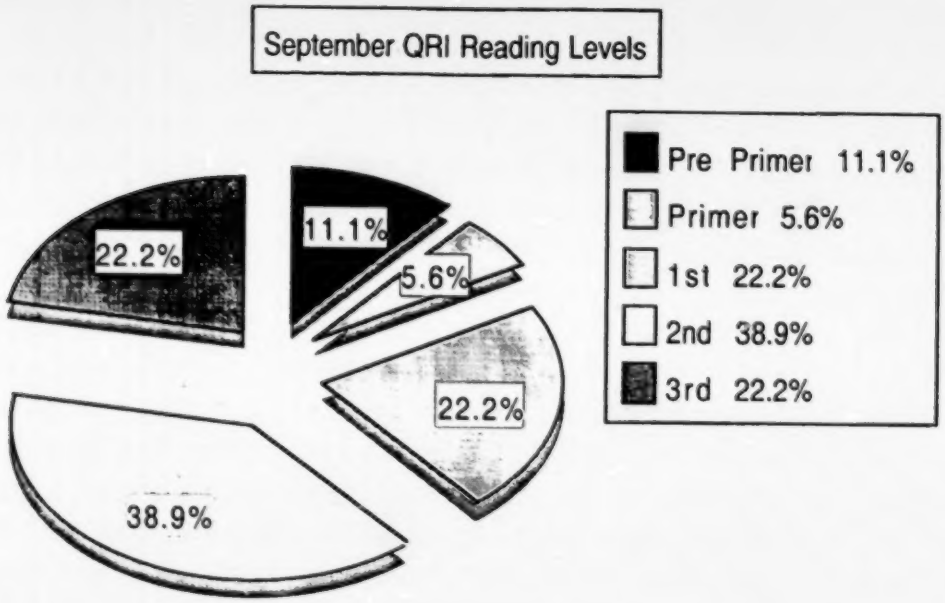

Figure 4. Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) pretest, September 2001

End of Selection Tests

In September of 2001, in School A, end of selection tests were administered to students to determine a base line for comprehension. The results as seen below in Figure 5, are as followed. The average comprehension score for September of 2001 was 72% accuracy.

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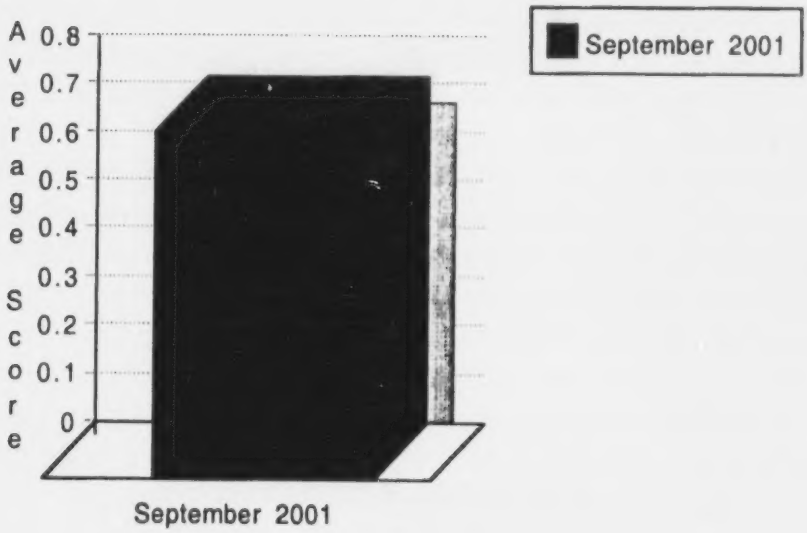

Figure 5. End of Selection pretest Average Scores, September 2001

Probable Causes

Why are students lacking basic reading comprehension skills? The researchers were able to identify several site based reasons for the problem through a Guided Reading Survey for Teachers (Appendix A) given to grade level teachers. The result of this survey indicates that guided reading as a teaching method is used inconsistently in the grade levels. For example, end of selection tests are used inconsistently by teachers to assess understanding of a story. There appears to be an inconsistent use of fall and spring assessments to determine a baseline and reading growth. Graphic organizers are used inconsistently to aid in reading comprehension.

Professional literature was consulted to support the researchers' findings. It was determined that the lack of comprehension strategies introduced through literature is a result of low comprehension skills. The study by Baumann, Hooten and

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White (1998) showed that the use of reading strategies and transfer techniques increased the students ability to comprehend the other reading texts. The students valued reading more, and appreciated books and literature because they had learned to express their opinions about what they were reading (Baumann, Hooten, & White, 1999).

Non ability, multilevel instruction is beneficial for all students. Teachers are able to individualize instruction to their own teaching style. The study by Cunningham, Hall and Defee (1998) showed that all children do not learn the same way. Children showed their preferences in their learning styles in school. They were extremely involved and interested in the type of instruction that met their learning style. Non ability grouping helped all levels of learners to achieve. Reading and writing skills improved with non ability grouping. Static reading groups have proven to be limiting for children in low, medium and high groups (Cunningham, Hall, Defee, 1998).

According to Johnston (1998), word study can be very beneficial and rewarding for students. Children achieve a great accomplishment when they can see evidence of individual learning. When teaching reading, the focus should be on comprehending interesting stories. For this to occur, it is vital that students are familiar with sight word vocabulary.

Goodman and Buck (1997) held that speakers of low-status dialects of English have much higher rates of reading failure than high-status dialect speakers. The author of the research suggested that teachers impose a disadvantage on students by rejecting their linguistic difference. If a student says in reading what he would normally say in speaking, he did produce an expected response. The author suggested that word-to-word accuracy should not be the focus but rather, it should be used to gain meaning from the reading passage.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Solution strategies used during guided reading instruction include flexible grouping, building sight vocabulary, early intervention, phonemic awareness, other reading strategies, graphic organizers and guided reading.

Flexible grouping is beneficial to all students for many reasons. Since students needs are so changing and individual, flexible grouping is important. By grouping and different ways for different purposes, the teacher can avoid labeling students with group names that are symbols of a static achievement level. Through flexible grouping, students are able to progress at their own reading rate. Teaching basic sight word vocabulary is vital to students progress. Students who are unfamiliar with text vocabulary will have difficulty with comprehension. Early intervention is very important for children who have difficulty acquiring reading skills. Early intervention decreases the frustration levels of students with difficulty. Phonemic awareness is very important for children to have when they are learning to read. If students are unfamiliar with phonemes in reading assignments, frustration levels will be increased.

Flexible Grouping

Flexible grouping allows students to work in a group with other students to learn a particular skill. When students are placed in flexible groups, they all feel part of the group. Involvement and success on the students part increases. Flexible grouping allows individual students differences to be met by using open ended assignments. The use of flexible grouping increases all students reading abilities. When flexible grouping is utilized, children are not labeled into individual reading groups by their

reading levels (Cummins, 1994).

Non ability, multilevel instruction is beneficial for all students. Teachers are able to individualize it to their own teaching style. The study expanded that all children do not learn the same way (Cunningham & Sidmon, 1999). Children show their preferences in their learning styles in school. They are extremely involved and interested and involved in the type of instruction that meets their learning style. Non ability grouping helps all levels of learners to achieve. Reading and writing skills improve with non ability grouping. Static reading groups have proven to be limiting for children in low, medium and high reading groups. (Cunningham, Hall & Defee, 1998).

Building Sight Vocabulary

Teachers need to carefully plan the activities they use to teach word learning. Word study can be very beneficial and rewarding for students. Children achieve a great accomplishment when they can see evidence of individual learning. When teaching reading, the focus cues should be on comprehending interesting stories. For this to occur, it is vital that students are familiar with sight word vocabulary (Johnston, 1998).

Early Intervention

Early intervention is a vital step in decreasing reading difficulties in children. There are many effective ways to increase phonemic awareness and word level skills with children who have difficulty with reading. Older readers have more difficulty with reading fluency compared to their normal reading peers. Intense language stimulation is a vital piece to assist children with low receptive and expressive language skills. Student-teacher discussions are extremely useful tools to assist in improving language skills. Intense instruction in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding and sight word recognition yielded high progress in reading

skills. Forty percent less children from the study were able to return to regular education without any special education needs. Sixty percent of the children continued to receive special assistance in reading. The size of the gains in reading achievement in this study were very large. The researchers report that, with the right level of intensity, and teachers skills, it is possible to obtain these rates of growth. (Educational Research Newsletter, 2001)

Reading failure can be prevented by using early identification and prevention. Children are usually systematically identified for special assistance and services by 3rd grade. By this time, remediation of any learning difficulties is harder to achieve sand more expensive. Once children experience failure and fall below grade level in word reading skills, intensive interventions need to be applied to bring them back to grade level. Reading fluency is hard to raise back to grade level due to reading practice time lost each year and month that they experience difficulty. (Torgesen,1998)

Many factors enter into reading difficulties with young children. Some factors that may affect their success are genetic learning problems, lack of preschool experience, attention difficulties, or school systems that have a reading program that does not address individual learning needs. Reading Recovery has yielded positive results with children in reading on independent evaluations. Reading Recovery has not yielded the same results with all children. Of the students in the research group, 35% were not able to achieve average grade level reading skills and 65% of the children were able to achieve grade level reading skills. Independent evaluations have attested to significant reading gains for children participating in Reading Recovery Programs (Hicks & Villaume 2001).

Second Language

Children who have English as a second language have experienced more difficulty than those children who are educated in English. Children also experience difficulty if a different dialect is spoken at home than the one used at school. Using one risk factor is not an accurate measure to use when predicting reading difficulties in children. Children who have a history of low achievement, live in lower socio-economic families and homes, have parents with learning difficulties, and lack processing skills in phonics have risk factors that may cause future reading difficulties. Kindergarten screenings are used to measure skills of children and they are not a costly tool to use (Snow, Burns, & Griffin 1998).

It has been widely held that speakers of low-status dialects of English have much higher rates of reading failure than high-status dialect speakers. The author of the article suggests that teachers impose a disadvantage on the students by rejecting their linguistic difference. If a student says in reading what he would normally say in speaking he is producing an expected response. The author suggests that word to word accuracy is not the focus but rather to gain meaning form the reading passage (Goodman & Buck, 1997).

Phonemic Awareness

Teachers must assess and respond to the individual needs of children. Teaching phonics within the context of written language and reading activities has proven to be beneficial to acquiring phonics skills. Multiple strategies to use in class while teaching phonics include writing their own stories, conferencing with the teacher and completing writing and reading activities with partners. Phonics is best taught in a learner centered classroom that includes both learning and teaching events. This program provided optimal attention to meet the individual needs of all children

(Dahl, & Scharer, 2000).

Intensive phonics instruction does not prove to yield higher scores on reading comprehension test past 3rd grade. Proficient readers utilize context clues, letter/sound relationships and prior knowledge when reading. Teaching phonics in isolation teaches children to sound out words individually. This process slows and impedes them and causes difficulty for them when they are trying to comprehend material they are reading. The most beneficial phonics instruction focuses on children's reading and attention, as well as understanding and seeing word families and patterns. The percentage gained ranged from 6.08 to 8.61 for the children. Students who were exposed to phonemic awareness scored highly than student who did not. (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

Other Reading Strategies

Teaching words in first grade should be done by using a variety of strategies. Shared reading should not be used in excess in class. Less predictable text should be used when children have acquired basic sight words. High frequency words should be reviewed in texts that also have a high interest level. Reading high frequency words in context increases comprehension and sight word recognition. When planning a lesson, teachers should include plans for the reader, the text and the tasks that they are choosing to utilize to increase sight word acquisition (Johnston, 1998).

The Four Blocks program consists of the Guided Reading Block, the Working With Words Block, The Writing Block, and the Self Selected Reading Block. In the Reading Block, each story is read and discussed several times. Fluency improves on the children who have difficulty with reading by the last reading. Using graphic organizers and listing information that is learned is very beneficial for students

comprehension. Another very important technique used in the Four Blocks program is keeping notes on index cards during their reading time. Graphic organizers are an integral part to the Guided Reading/Four Blocks Program (Cunningham, Hall & Sidmon, 1999).

Quality reading instruction is very important for students. This takes precedent over the location or staff member teaching the student. Small group instruction is beneficial for all children, especially when it is used with special needs children. The program design contributes to each child's success. Multiple reading approaches such as direct instruction, sounding out letters and using modalities to teach are beneficial to make a balanced reading program. Keen observation skills and a clear understanding of the reading process enables teachers to monitor and offer reinforcement to children's literacy instruction (Hedrick & Pearish, 1999).

Guided Reading

Research has shown that students who are not reading by third grade are not likely to learn to read. Therefore, it is important to support reading improvement in the early grades, and strengthen reading instruction skills to increase students reading comprehension skills. Providing a balanced literacy program on a regular basis provides a variety of reading and writing activities. Teachers expose children to a wide range of experiences and instruction necessary to help children become good readers. Comprehension strategies introduced with literature can give students a greater understanding of what they have read. In turn, greater understanding can lead to greater enjoyment and the start of a lifelong love of reading (Baumann, Hooten, & White, 1999).

Through the use of guided reading, teachers are able to show children how to read and they are able to support children as they read. Providing guided reading in

ones program, leads to the independent reading that builds the process of increasing reading comprehension and writing capabilities.

According to Clay (1991), the process is "learning how to access visual sources of information while reading for meaning with divided attention" (p. 286). The more children use their skills of problem solving while reading, the greater and more flexible their problem solving skills become. Guided reading is designed to support this process.

The main components of guided reading are that the teacher explains and demonstrates the important things to be done while reading. There are many strategies that readers need to use while reading all text in order to help increase their reading comprehension. Some of the strategies used in the guided reading program to help increase reading comprehension skills include:

1. recalling background knowledge of the subject
2. predicting what will be learned and what will happen
3. making mental pictures related to the topic
4. determine the most important ideas and events
5. drawing conclusions and making inferences based on what is read
6. comparing and contrasting what you've read to what you already know
7. deciphering the meaning of unknown words
8. making decision on "Why you think" "Did you like it?" "Did you agree?" "Could it really happen?"

Guided reading lessons involve the teacher modeling, demonstrating, explaining, and brainstorming using the above strategies.

When guided reading is used along with literature circles, reading workshop, whole-class novel study, and content-area reading instruction, students are provided

with a rich variety of reading experiences and have access to all of the elements that help increase their reading comprehension skills (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

Visualization is strategy used in Guided Reading. The use of graphic organizers assist students in building pictures in their minds. The student are able to recall information by visualizing their interpretation of a story (Burns, 1999).

Graphic Organizers

Graphic organizers can be used as a pre reading activity, during and as a final activity. There are many different types of graphic organizers at all levels to assist teachers and students learning. "Using cognitive organizers during reading can help students to become more actively involved in the reading process, particularly if students construct their own organizers" (Burns, 1999, p. 225) Webs of related words about a key concept word from a story helps activate any prior knowledge before reading a novel. Semantic maps as developed by Blachowicz and Fisher (1996) are more thought provoking than simple webbing. Students can generate words related to a topic. This helps teachers discuss relationships between words and categories. The use of a KWL graphic organizer developed by Ogle (1996) is another strategy that will assist students in gathering information from the text.

Graphic organizers are a popular format used in guided reading. These lessons consist of having the students construct various organizers to help the readers organize information. They also can be used to help children focus on specific aspects of stories they are reading. In doing so, students are able to organize their thoughts and ideas about what they have read and in turn have a better understanding of the story or information.

Webs are one type of graphic organizer used to help children organize topics, sub topics and relationships. Students brainstorm before actually reading and record

known information. Then at the end of a reading selection, new learned information is added to the web. Webs help students break information down into topics and sub topics which help them develop outlines in the upper grades.

Feature matrix is another type of graphic organizer used in guided reading. This type of organizer comes in a variety of layouts that are infinitely adaptable. They help children organize information that compares and contrasts members of the same category. These charts can be used across the curriculum to help children organize important information learned from reading.

Story maps are also used as graphic organizers in guided reading. These organizers are an effective device to guide students' thinking when they are reading a story. Story maps help organize information such as main characters setting, problems, major events, solutions and themes. Story maps should be completed together as a class to help students completely understand how to use them. They can be used at any level. Picture story maps or written story maps are very useful strategies teachers use to help increase students understanding of written text. Once students understand the elements, it is important to allow the students to complete them in small groups or by themselves. There are many variations of story maps available in guided reading. It is important for teachers to realize the potential of their students before deciding which ones to use.

Teachers often determine what they want students to think about as they read, how text is organized, or to show topic and sub topic, compare-contrast, or time, order relationships, a graphic organizer is often the most efficient format for supporting the reading strategy used. When graphic organizers are used as a reading support strategy, students are able to organize important information, sequence events, put topics into categories, predict, elaborate, anticipate answers to questions, compare

and contrast characters, or events and much more. All of these skills will help the students become better readers and retain what they have read. Therefore, reading comprehension skills will improve (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

Some children find learning to read very difficult. These children often fail to "discover" effective reading strategies. The strugglers need access to a variety of teaching methods and strategies. Guided reading lessons provide children with the assistance they need today in order to develop the proficiency to have a go at it alone tomorrow (Cunningham & Allington, 1999).

Project Objective

As a result of guided reading instruction, during the period of September, 2001 to December, 2001, the targeted primary students will increase their reading comprehension as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Test and end of selection reading tests.

Process Statements

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes will be implemented:

1. Guided Reading materials will be implemented to foster reading comprehension skills.

2. Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (1995) will be administered to determine reading levels and flexible grouping.

3. End of selection tests will be administered to address reading comprehension skills and to assist in flexible grouping.

4. A series of graphic organizers will be used to assist students ability to identify main characters, setting, problem, solution and resolution. They will also be used to assist in comprehension of the text.

Action Plan

Guided reading is an essential part of a balanced literacy program at any level of school. It provides the setting for teaching skills and strategies and also a place to assess reading comprehension (Tomkins, 2001). In Guided Reading, a teacher works with a flexible, small group of students. During this time, the teacher helps students to develop and use a range of skills and strategies to read text independently. During the time in which the teacher is conducting a guided reading lesson, the other students are working independently at centers associated with the curriculum.

Guided Reading lessons usually last 30 - 40 minutes. Over the period of one week, students will move through six steps of the guided reading process. School A,B,C, and D will be implementing the guided reading program.

Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test

The Gates-MacGinitie Standardized Test (1989) will be administered as a pretest in September of 2001 to establish a baseline for individual reading levels by schools C and D (Gates-MacGinitie, 1989). The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test consists of two subtests, these test vocabulary and comprehension skills. The vocabulary subtest provides a visual cue with four word choices. The comprehension subtest requires the student to read a short statement and choose the visual cue to match.

The Gates-MacGinitie will be administered again in December of 2001 by schools C and D as a posttest to document improvement of student's reading comprehension.

Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)

The Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (1995) is an individually administered

informal reading inventory designed to provide information about student's ability to identify words and comprehend text.

The QRI (1995) contains narrative and expository passages at different reading levels. This allows for students strengths and weaknesses to be identified in the areas of word identification and comprehension.

The QRI will be administered in September of 2001 by schools A and B. Each student will begin reading orally at a determined level. Once the student has reached a frustration level (less than 70%), this is the reading level in which the will begin the guided reading program.

Guided Reading

Guided reading lessons will be implemented on a daily basis during a five day school week by schools A,B,C,and D. The following will occur during a 20-30 minute time period with each guided reading flexible group:

Vocabulary

Teachers will select 4-5 vocabulary words selected from the text. These vocabulary words will then be introduced to students using a variety of strategies. Some of these may include pictures, flash cards, word games and decoding activities. This part of the guided reading program is used to pre-teach unfamiliar words that the student will be exposed to throughout the story. Introduction of vocabulary words will take 7-10 minutes.

Introduction of Story

For the next 5-7 minutes of Guided Reading, teachers will introduce the story. This may be done several ways. The teacher may ask students to read the summary on the back of the book and then discuss what they read. Students may be asked to listen as the teacher gives a short summary of the

story while showing pictures from the book. During the introduction of the story, teachers may choose to introduce the names of main characters, give the setting of the story or pose a problem to students that they will encounter in the text. At this time, students may draw upon prior knowledge to make predictions about the story.

Reading the Story

For the next 10-15 minutes, students will be reading the text. The goal for the teacher is to listen to students read independently. It is important to have students begin reading at different times in order to avoid "round robin" reading. To help in this process, teachers may pass out the story to each student at different times. Once they have been given the book, students may begin reading. Students should be encouraged to read in quiet voices. Teachers may ask students to speak up when they are listening to their reading of the text. The teacher then needs to move from student to student and listen to each of them read independently. Teachers should listen for any difficulties that the students are having. Reading strategies, such as sounding out a word or looking at the pictures can be encouraged. If a student finishes before the entire guided reading group has finished, they should begin reading the text again.

Discussion of Story

After all students have completed reading the text, a discussion will take place. This part of the Guided Reading Program will take 7-10 minutes. The teacher will ask questions that elicit direct response from students and questions that will allow the students to infer. This is a time in which the teacher can make anecdotal notes about each student's comprehension.

There are a variety of ways in which a Guided Reading discussion can take place. Teachers may choose to have questions typed up for students to answer and then discuss as a group. Teachers may verbally ask students' questions about the text that relate to characters, setting and comprehension. Finally, teachers may ask students to act out or retell the story in their own words. The goal of the discussion is to see that comprehension has taken place.

During the guided reading process, the teachers will use the guided reading checklist to document student behaviors and to target skills to be taught. A sample of the guided reading checklist can be found in Appendix B.

Graphic Organizers

As a major component of the intervention, students will be given one of several chosen graphic organizers. Students will be asked to complete the graphic organizer to show that comprehension of the text has taken place. After all students have completed the graphic organizer, a short review will take place. The teacher will go over the major components of the graphic organizer and declare that all students in the guided reading group have reached comprehension. This part of the program will take 5-7 minutes. A series of the graphic organizers used in the guided reading program can be found in the Appendix C.

End of Selection Test

At the end of each story, student in each Guided Reading group will be given an end of selection test. Tests will be taken from the Guided Reading Program at each school. The test will consist of 7-10 questions related to the story. All tests will consist of multiple-choice in which students are

asked to select the best answer. End of selections test will be graded by the teacher and the teacher will determine if each student is able to move to the next leveled text. Sample end of selection tests can be found in Appendix D.

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of these interventions, students will be given a pre and post test to determine the growth in their reading comprehension levels. The teachers will also use end of selection tests and guided reading checklists to chart reading comprehension and guided reading behaviors.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of Intervention

The action research project entitled increasing reading comprehension through the use of guided reading was implemented in August 2001 and came to its conclusion in December 2001. The objective of the study was to increase reading comprehension as measured by the Gates (1989), QRI (1995) and end of selection tests. This was accomplished through the implementation of 4 processes: first, the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) was administered, in the Fall 2001, in second and third grades, to assess reading comprehension skills and to assist in forming initial groupings; second, guided reading materials were implemented to foster reading comprehension skills; third, end of selection tests were administered after each story to address reading comprehension skills and to assist in flexible grouping and finally, a series of graphic organizers were used to assist students abilities to identify main characters, setting, problem, solution and resolution, and assist in comprehension of the text.

The researchers began their efforts to increase reading comprehension of the students in their classroom by administering Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) to determine individual reading levels and form flexible grouping. As evidenced by the teachers surveys it was clear that the students at each site were lacking in the reading comprehension skills necessary for them to be successful in the classroom. During the time of the action research, September 2001 through December 2001 there were a number of observations made by the researchers regarding the action plan.

When reflecting upon the teaching of guided reading skills, the researchers found that the students were engaged throughout most of the lessons. The frequency

of the lessons had to be modified based on the age and grade levels of the students. Originally the researchers had planned on teaching guided reading lessons daily for 30 to 40 minutes. This proved to be overwhelming for the younger students due to their limited reading abilities. The guided reading lessons had to be modified for the younger children, in the first grade classroom, to 3 lessons per week while the older students continued with the original plan of 5 days per week.

The first component of the action plan was to administer a Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (1995). The researchers found that the QRI in the lower grades was very time consuming than originally expected due to their limited reading ability. The researchers agreed that the information gained form the QRI was well worth the time spent determining reading levels and forming flexible groupings.

The QRI. determines the students word recognition levels as well as independent reading levels. This allows the researchers to group their student according to different reading levels. It is crucial to have a baseline of the students reading levels prior to starting the Guided Reading Program. While using the Guided Reading Program, students work at their own pace in small groups instruction at their independent reading levels. Therefore, it is a very important component to administer a QRI.

The first grade class at School D took more time to implement guided reading compared to the second and third grades at Schools A, B, and C. The researcher from the first grade class at School D reflected in his journal, " I have mixed feelings about guided reading. This years class seems to be very needy and requires a lot of time spent modeling. I don't know if I have enough time in the day. Although I can see the light at the end of the tunnel, this will be beneficial."

In the third and fourth grade classes from Schools A, B, and C guided reading

was already an acquired skill. The researcher from School A stated, " guided reading has been extremely beneficial for the students. The students have the foundation in order to become proficient readers. It is amazing to see the light bulbs turning on."

Documented in the researchers journal from School C was the following statement, " today was a frustrating day during guided reading. The students had a difficult time focusing on the lesson due to the holiday party scheduled for the afternoon. I realized that this lesson had to be revisited when the students could focus later in the week."

By the end of the research period, the students guided reading skills had improved. The researchers noted that the time spent in direct instruction and modeling had decreased and the students independent working habits had increased.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)

The Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (1995) was given to the students in the second and third grade classrooms as the final component of the action research plan. The results (Figure 6) showed that there was growth and improvement in the areas of decoding skills, comprehension, and reading behaviors. However, there were areas in which reading skills did not improve. The researchers observed that some students were not consistent in applying the reading skills. On the post QRI, the number of students reading at the pre-primer level decreased by 6%. The number of students reading at the second grade level increased slightly by 2%. In general, the researchers noted that the students reading levels, post intervention, changed more significantly at the lower reading levels.

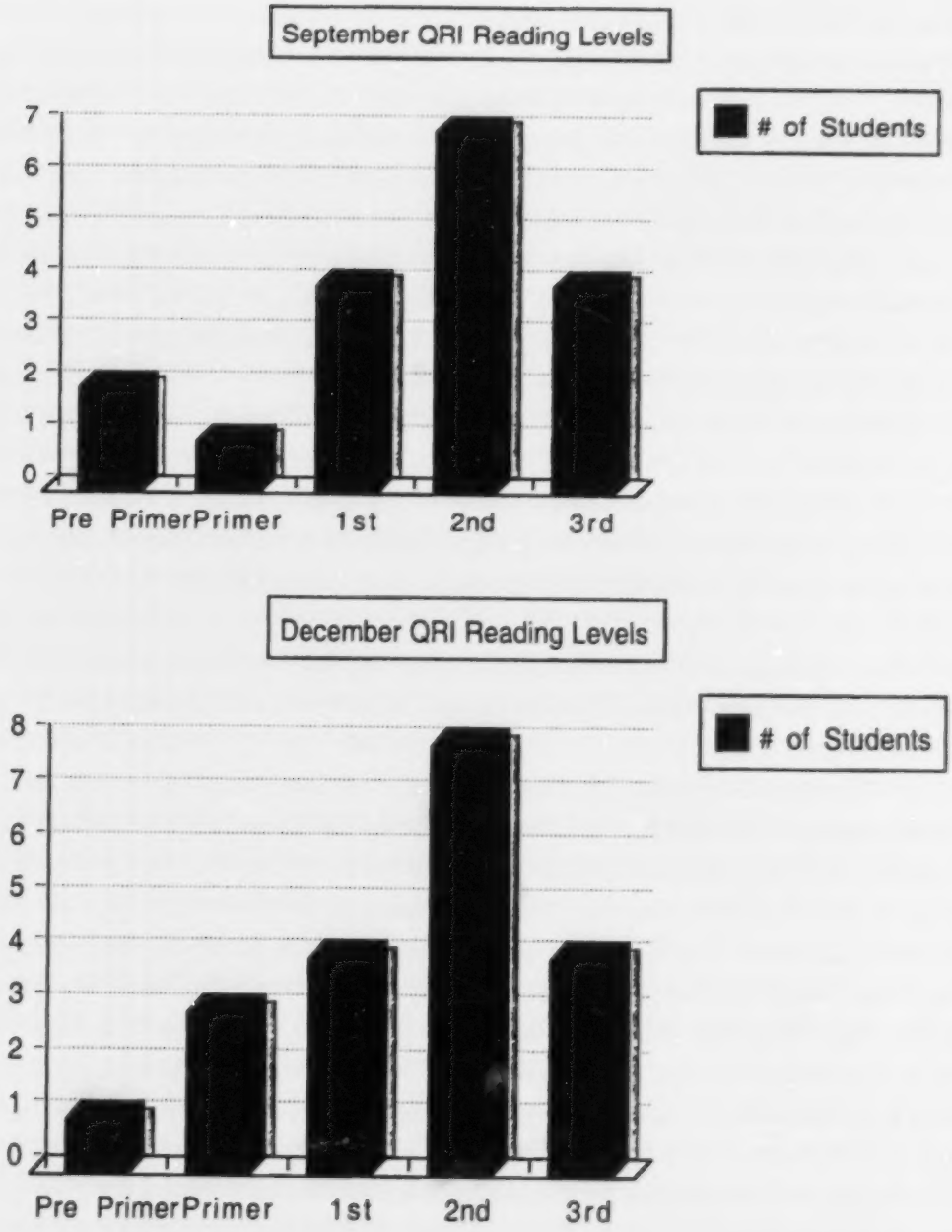

Figure 6. Comparison of QRI Pre & Post Test

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End of Selection Tests

End of selection tests were given to all students in first through third grades to assess reading comprehension. The results (Figure 7) showed an increase in reading comprehension skills. In addition to the improvements of the students reading levels, the students increased their reading comprehension as evidenced through the end of selection tests. For example, on the pre-intervention end of selection test, students scores ranged from 33% to 75% in total comprehension. After the intervention, the researchers noted and increase in the students comprehension as evidenced by the end of selection scores, ranging from 50% to 100% of correct responses. As a result of the end of selection, the researchers determined different ways to change and adapt their instruction to meet the needs of their students. In turn, this resulted in an increase in student reading comprehension skills. It was documented in one researcher's journal, "Since the implementation of end of selection tests, I have begun to create my own tests. As a result, I feel more confident about what comprehension skills I want my students to develop."

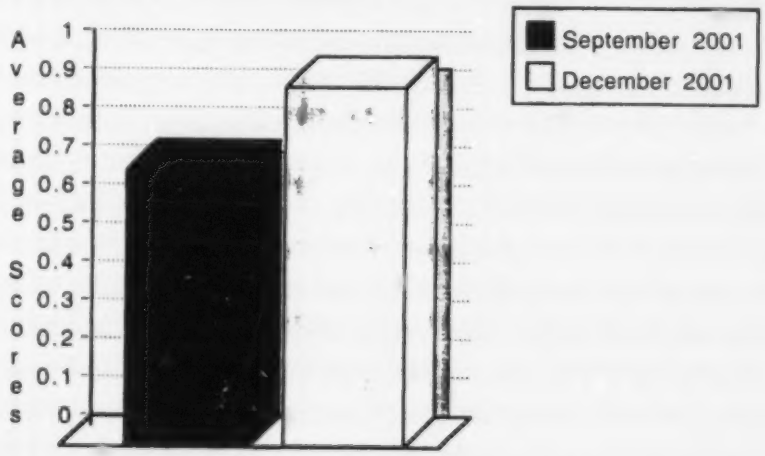

Figure 7. End of Selection Test Scores, September -vs- December 2001

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Graphic Organizers

The researchers noticed that by consistently using graphic organizers, there was significant improvement in student comprehension. During guided reading instruction, the researchers noted that after the introduction of graphic organizers, the students were better able independently to recall information from the story. The use of the organizers help students organize important information, sequence events, put topics into categories, predict, elaborate, anticipate answers to questions and compare and contrast characters. Most importantly, the students were able to visualize the major elements of a story. The researchers observed that guided reading behaviors assisted students toward greater comprehension. For example, students through the use of repeated readings retained crucial information from the text, as well as fluency in their reading. It was also observed that the behavior of tracking the print helped the students focus on the text for more information. The researcher from school B stated: "Graphic organizers have been a God send. I don't know how I ever taught without them for all these years. Even the IEP students benefitted by the use of this wonderful tool."

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers conclude that guided reading was very successful at all grade levels. Even though we experienced great success, at times it was frustrating implementing strategies with the lower grade children. With perseverance and always looking ahead to the light at the end if the tunnel, the researchers felt confident with the gain in comprehension that their students achieved.

The researchers would highly recommend guided reading as a teaching method in all grade levels. It is crucial to include graphic organizers as a major component to teach the students how to organize information and therefore increase

their reading comprehension. Researcher from School B noted in her journal," My first experiences in teaching reading never involved the use of graphic organizers. Since the implementation of this research I question the training I received in my reading methods classes, how did I ever survive following their outdated model?"

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX A

TEACHER SURVEY

Observations

1. Does the child use context clues?

2. Does the child use picture clues?

3. Does the child sound out unknown words phonetically?

4. Is the child able to retell the story to show comprehension?

5. Is the child able to define new vocabulary after reading the story?

Guided Reading for Teachers Survey
Please read each question and circle yes or no
Date:_____

1. Do you use guided reading in your classroom? yes no

2. Do you group your children according to reading ability level? yes no

3. Do you use a phonics program in your classroom? yes no

4. Do you have a word wall in your classroom? yes no

5. Do you introduce new vocabulary, related to a story, before the first reading of the story? yes no

6. Do you use picture clues as a way to teach new vocabulary? yes no

7. Do you teach your children to utilize context clues to understand unknown words? yes no

8. Do you use end of selection tests to assess reading comprehension? yes no

9. Do you give a vocabulary pretest to determine a baseline for you children? yes no

10. Do you track your children's vocabulary retention through annual assessments? yes no

APPENDIX B

GUIDED READING CHECKLIST

Guided Reading Checklist for:_____

+ consistently applies < occasionally applies - does not apply

Dates of observation:											
DECODING STRATEGIES: picture clues											
context clues											
skip it											
chunks											
beginning sounds											
ending sounds											
patterns											
applies sight words											
COMPREHENSION: confirms predictions											
retells: characters											
setting											
problem											
solution											
sequence events											
question and answer											
vocabulary											
inferential											
author's message											
BEHAVIORS: fluency											
expression											
punctuation											
attending to print											
print tracking											

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE END OF SELECTION TESTS

Name_____ Date_____

1.How did the rabbits feel when they saw the cat?

_____

_____

2. If you were a rabbit what would you do when you saw the cat?

_____

_____

The School yard Mystery
Chapter 1

Name_____ Date_____

1. What does Justin think when Chip writes him a note saying "I'm not sick. I'm just invisible"?

2. What do the children play with at recess?

3. How did Chip become invisible?

4. What does the title of Chapter 1 "Tears in the Classroom" mean to you?

Name_____ Date_____

How Much is That Guinea Pig in the Window?
Chapter 2

1. How can the class earn extra money?

2. What did Jon do every afternoon?

3. What did Brad do instead of collecting cans?

4. What is Jon afraid of?

The Berenstain Bear Scouts: Ghost versus Ghost
Chapter 3 and 4

Name_____ Date_____

1. What is wrong with Squawk?

2. Why does Ralph begin to cry?

3. What did each card catalogue have on it?

4. Who checked out all the survival books?

Amber Brown is Not A Crayon
Chapter 5 and 6

1. Where did Justin go and for what reason?

2. What did Amber's parents tell her they were doing?

3. Where did Amber's father get moved to for a year?

4. What three things does Amber hate more than fractions?

5. How many 3rd grade classes are there in Justin's new school?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT LETTER

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Improving Reading Comprehension of Primary Students through Guided Reading

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently enrolled in a master's degree program at Saint Xavier University. This program requires me to design and implement a project on an issue that directly affects my instruction. I have chosen to assess students reading comprehension.

The purpose of this project is to implement reading comprehension strategies. It will provide your student with various methods to gain understanding from what they have read.

I will be conducting my project from September 2001 to December 2001. The activities related to the project will take place during regular instructional delivery. The gathering of information for my project during these activities offers no risk of any kind to your child.

Your permission allows me to include your student in the reporting of information for my project. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential, and information included in the project report will be grouped so that no individual can be identified. The report will be used to share what I have learned as a result of this project with other professionals in the field of education.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate, information gathered about you student will not be included in the report.

If you have any questions or would like further information about my project, please contact me at.

If you agree to have your student participate in the project, please sign the attached statement and return it to me. I will be happy to provide you with a copy of the statement if you wish.

Sincerely,

PLEASE RETURN THE ATTACHED STATEMENT TO ME BY FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2001

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